

What Is Claimed Is:

1. A method of conducting electronic commerce, the method comprising:
opening a user account with a vendor for a user;

issuing one or more electronic tokens from the vendor to the user, and adding the one or more electronic tokens issued by the vendor to the user account;

providing products and services that may be purchased through the vendor, wherein prices for the products and services are listed in units of electronic tokens;

permitting the user to select a subset of the products and services for purchase;

computing a total price for the selected subset of the products and services in units of electronic tokens; and

if the user account contains electronic tokens having a value equal to or greater than the total price, permitting the user to purchase the selected subset of the products and services, and subtracting the total price from the user account.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein issuing one or more electronic tokens from the vendor to the user comprises permitting the user to purchase the one or more electronic tokens from the vendor.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein permitting the user to purchase the one or more electronic tokens from the vendor comprises permitting the user to conduct an on-line transaction using a

credit card to purchase the one or more electronic tokens.

4. The method of claim 2, wherein permitting the user to purchase the one or more electronic tokens from the vendor comprises permitting the user to conduct an off-line transaction to purchase the one or more electronic tokens.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein permitting the user to conduct an off-line transaction to purchase the one or more electronic tokens comprises permitting the user to use a purchase order to purchase the one or more electronic tokens.

6. The method of claim 4, wherein permitting the user to conduct an off-line transaction to purchase the one or more electronic tokens comprises permitting the user to request to be billed for the one or more electronic tokens.

7. The method of claim 4, wherein permitting the user to conduct an off-line transaction to purchase the one or more electronic tokens comprises permitting the user to use phone, fax, mail, or e-mail to purchase the one or more electronic tokens.

8. The method of claim 4, wherein permitting the user to conduct an off-line transaction to purchase the one or more electronic tokens comprises permitting the user to purchase electronic tokens without using a credit card.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein issuing the one or more electronic tokens comprises setting a price for the one or more electronic tokens, the price determined by the vendor.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein opening a user account with a vendor comprises registering the user with the vendor.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein registering the user with the vendor comprises recording personal information about the user in a database maintained by the vendor.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein registering the user with the vendor comprises acquiring personal information about the user through off-line communications.

13. The method of claim 10, wherein opening a user account with the vendor further comprises issuing a predetermined minimum number of electronic tokens to the user.

14. The method of claim 1, further comprising issuing additional electronic tokens to the user.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein issuing additional electronic tokens to the user comprises permitting the user to purchase additional electronic tokens if the user account does not contain enough electronic tokens to cover the total price of the selected subset of products and services.

17. The method of claim 1, further comprising displaying a number of available electronic tokens in the user account on a computer screen.

18. The method of claim 1, wherein providing products and services that may be purchased through the vendor comprises providing software to be purchased or rented in exchange for electronic tokens.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein providing software to be purchased or rented comprises providing software that is rented for a limited time.

20. The method of claim 18, wherein providing software to be purchased or rented comprises providing software that is rented for a limited number of uses.

21. The method of claim 18, wherein providing software to be purchased or rented comprises providing software that is rented for processing a given task for a specific number of times.

22. The method of claim 18, wherein providing software to be purchased or rented further comprises permitting the user to extend the software rental in exchange for electronic tokens.

B1 ↗ 23. The method of claim 18, wherein providing software to be purchased or rented further comprises permitting the user to convert rental software to purchased software in exchange for electronic tokens.

24. The method of claim 18, wherein providing software to be purchased or rented further comprises determining if a selected software program is already installed on a user's computer, downloading and installing the selected software program if the selected software program is not already installed on the user's computer, and sending an authorization code, without downloading the selected software program, if the selected software program is already installed on the user's computer.

25. The method of claim 1, further comprising transferring electronic tokens from the user to a second user.

26. The method of claim 1, wherein providing products and services that may be purchased through the vendor comprises listing products and services for sale by one or more users of a Web site maintained by the vendor.

Sub 2 ↗ 27. A server operated by a vendor that provides products for sale or rental through a network, the server comprising:

a network interface through which the server communicates with a user over the network;

a database;

a memory;

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a purchase routine that determines if the user account contains electronic tokens having a value equal to or greater than the total price, and if so, subtracts the total price from the user account.